

2006 Session Report

State Representative

Mary Lou Dickerson

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

36th District Town Hall Meeting!

Please join me for an important
Town Hall Meeting

April 29th: 10 a.m. to noon.

Antioch University
2326 6th Ave. in Seattle
Room 100

(see back page)



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State Representative

36th District

Mary Lou Dickerson

2006 Session Report



Dear Friends,

It feels great to be able to focus on good news in my final newsletter of the 59th Legislature. As you'll see, we made good progress on the issues that matter most to our 36th District – including education, transportation and the environment.

I'm also writing to invite you to an important April 29 town hall meeting with all your state legislators—Please plan on joining us. We'd enjoy seeing you and hearing your ideas about future priorities.

One of the best parts of the session being over is that I'm back home in the district. We're in the historic Ballard Office Building, corner of 22nd and Market Street: Suite 310-A. Phone: 206-545-6513. Please feel free to call or email us to make an appointment, share your ideas or voice your concerns.

It's good to be home again, especially after a successful year. Thank you again for the honor of representing the best legislative district in Washington!

Sincerely,

Mary Lou

Mary Lou Dickerson

Replacing the Viaduct

At last, we finally have a timetable that requires public involvement and financial accountability in the decision over whether to rebuild the Alaskan Way Viaduct or replace it with a tunnel.

It's been a year since Seattle lawmakers convinced the Legislature to invest \$2 billion in the project, and fully five years since the Nisqually Earthquake made fixing the Viaduct an urgent safety issue. Another year of delay would further endanger public safety and inflate design costs by \$15 to \$20 million. Two years of delay would add \$50 million in taxpayer costs.

Frankly, I have serious questions about the fiscal realities of the \$4.4 billion tunnel option that some support. Is the cost projection realistic? Mega-projects average 40 percent cost overruns, which would add nearly \$2 billion of costs. Is there a realistic financing plan that would not undermine other critical public needs? There are as yet no assurances. Only theoretical hopes.

I called on the Legislature to require regional leaders to involve the public and make a final decision on the future and financing of the Viaduct this year. With Gov. Chris Gregoire's help, a reasonable compromise was worked out that:

- Requires the Department of Transportation to complete all environmental and financing work before starting construction. This includes having a workable financing plan that clearly identifies funding sources, cash flow and construction time-lines.
- Requires an unbiased, expert panel to review project plans and make recommendations to the Governor by September 1, 2006.
- Requires public involvement in the decision, either by an advisory vote or public hearings conducted by the Seattle City Council. In either case, a decision on a preferred option must be made by November of this year.



People may disagree on whether the Viaduct should be rebuilt or replaced with a tunnel. But I hope we can all agree the final decision should be made soon, with full disclosure of costs and financing, and with strong public involvement. Public safety and our future depend on it.



A Responsible Budget

Strong revenues enabled us to pass a supplemental budget that includes improved funding for education, health care, public safety and the environment—including Puget Sound clean-up. It also ends the unpopular parking fees at state parks! Importantly, it is also a prudent budget that saves more than \$900 million and will help us avoid the roller-coaster budgeting we faced last recession.

Committees: Juvenile Justice & Family Law - Chair
Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks
Children & Family Services
Transportation

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Great year for education!

High school sophomores are taking the WASL this spring, which sets the highest academic standards in state history. As the Seattle School District requested, we created alternatives to the WASL to provide more pathways to graduation. Just as importantly, we set and met higher standards for funding education this year— adding more than \$324 million to improve education from preschool to graduate school.

Seattle schools alone gained more than \$5 million in the 2006 Supplemental Budget—on top of the \$19 million enhancement in the 2005-06 budget.

Seattle School District Gains in 2006

Funding Initiative 732:	\$2.2 million
Student help for WASL:	\$1.5 million
Teacher Cost of Living Adj:	\$1 million
Vocational skills:	\$141,000
Bus fuel help:	\$322,000



At the college level, we added hundreds of enrollment opportunities in high-demand fields such as nursing and engineering. This is on top of the 7,900 college enrollments we funded last year.

But the most exciting change may be a new emphasis on early learning, which will be coordinated in a Department of Early Learning. When this initiative is fully up and running it make a huge difference to children and the future of our schools.

Earthquakes, Landslides & Public Safety

My Disaster Preparedness Newsletter last November showed a map of geological hazards in Ballard, Queen Anne and other parts of Seattle — and warned we must learn more about these threats in Washington to protect public safety. The Legislature agreed, passing my proposal to improve mapping and assessment of seismic, landslide, tsunami and volcanic hazards (HB 2384) and providing \$1 million for the project. I truly believe this information will help building codes, architects and disaster-response plans save lives and structures from natural disasters.



Photo by John Shea/FEMA News Photo

Are special tax breaks fair?

I gladly cosponsored a new law that requires performance audits of the billions of dollars of special tax preferences in Washington. These audits will tell us which tax preferences really serve public interests by creating jobs or other public benefits, and which should be ended because they are merely special-interest tax loopholes. This is an issue of basic fairness—those who pay less than their share of taxes are unfairly forcing everyone else to pay more.

Protecting Family Medical Leave

It’s outrageous that the Bush Administration is trying to roll back the federal Family Medical Leave Act! Working families deserve and need the right to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for birth, adoption or serious illness. Fortunately, we moved quickly to save these protections (which exempt small businesses) for working families in Washington by putting them into our 2006 state laws. I sponsored the House version of the Senate bill that passed.



Reinvesting in Youth

Take a bow, King County! King County is showing that early, research-proven strategies to reduce juvenile crime can turn kids’ lives around before they need placement in a juvenile rehabilitation facility at a cost of \$60,000 a year. Better still, lawmakers unanimously passed my Reinvesting in Youth Act to help all Washington counties take advantage of these effective early-intervention strategies. Funding will come from reinvesting state savings due to reduced crime and corrections costs.

As King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng said about my bill, “Reinvesting in our youth is one of the most important things we can do for our community. Simply put, if we build hope and opportunity for kids today, we will need fewer prisons tomorrow.”



Helping Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities who get services from birth to age three often make miraculous gains, and more than 20% avoid costly special education in later years. I wish you could have heard the stories of children helped by these services, which are already offered in many school districts. Seattle began offering it in January. Districts will be fully reimbursed for these services.

With the support of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, I proposed requiring every school district to offer these valuable services by 2009. After hearing evidence from school officials and proud parents of what can be achieved, lawmakers unanimously agreed these special children deserve birth to three services statewide to reach their full potentials.



Foster Youth Achievement Act

Did you know that foster children in Washington who work hard to earn a high school diploma automatically lose all state support on their 18th birthday? Imagine losing your home, health coverage and stability—because you succeeded at school! This tragically misguided policy has bred homelessness and other hardships for foster youth while adding enormous social costs for all of us. It also sends exactly the wrong message about the value of education.

The Foster Youth Achievement Act I sponsored offers a brighter future for foster youth. It will let up to 50 academically successful foster children stay in their foster homes with state support until age 21, provided they are actively pursuing a college or vocational degree and maintaining a “C” average.

The foster kids who testified for the Foster Youth Achievement Act were inspiring, and as one community services director told lawmakers: “The cost-benefits analysis would blow your minds.” The happy result? It passed the House and Senate by a combined vote of 141-1. Congratulations to all current and former foster children: You earned this law!



Caring for our Environment

This was a very good legislative year for our environment. We passed needed laws to reduce oil-spill risks and pollution from leaking septic systems in Puget Sound, created a plan to control dangerous electronic wastes and launched an Energy Freedom initiative to create home-grown bio-diesel fuel and reduce our dependence on imported oil.

Yes, there were disappointments. We still need stronger state protections of old-growth forests, a ban on toxic flame retardants (PBDE’s) and tough laws to prevent cruise ship waste from fouling the Sound. But overall, as the Seattle Times said, it was a “remarkably productive” session for our environment.

Come to our Town Hall Meeting!

Please join Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles, Rep. Helen Sommers and me for an important Town Hall Meeting

When: April 29, 2006 – 10 a.m. to noon.

Where: Antioch University
2326 6th Ave. in Seattle
Room 100

Why: To discuss new laws and policies enacted in 2006 and hear your thoughts about what our future priorities will be.